

# 'WE'RE AHEAD OF THE NDC CURVE' SAYS TRAVELPORT



Travelport CEO, Ian Hickey (left), and IATA CEO, Willie Walsh (right), at the IATA World Airline Summit in Sydney, Australia.

By Bruce Piper

**T**RAVELPORT'S Travel Merchandising Platform (TMP) already incorporates many elements of IATA's proposed New Distribution Capability (NDC), according to the company's vice president global distribution and sales, Ian Hickey.

While Travelport is very much in favour of standards, the company is moving much faster than dictated by IATA's current timeline which projects a pilot NDC in place by 2016. Hickey told travellers during the recent IATA World Airline Summit in Sydney.

"Standards make life easier, but we have to go beyond," he said.

Hickey said the development of NDC is a manifestation of the desire from the airline community to have flexibility to merchandise various add-on products via indirect channels. The initial phase of discussions about NDC had created confusion, fear, uncertainty and doubt among the travel community, but that initial scepticism has now declined.

"We share the same vision with NDC, modernising the way that airlines can merchandise," he said, with Travelport already out there signing up customers to its Rich Content and

Rich Content offering. The development of the TMP has focused on what's currently missing from GDSs – what current systems do not do and what is needed moving forward, to make it easier for travel agents to sell airline ancillaries and add-ons.

The platform gives airlines the flexibility to connect with the GDS via an XML API rather than simply relying to have had with ATPCO. This also means the system can more easily link to low cost carriers with AirAsia, Tigerair, Spirit and EasyJet all currently

loading content and ancillaries into the platform, Hickey added.

Travelport head of global supplier strategy, Ian Heywood, said there's a strong imperative for airlines to distribute ancillaries as widely as possible, with a recent study revealing that more than \$150B in the ancillaries are transacted globally each year, offering a significant revenue stream.

Some airlines which have connected to the platform already use a hybrid model – for example Delta Air Lines sells some of its "Economy Comfort" seating via XML while still continuing to do business with ATPCO.

"We will do whatever we need to in order to get the content to the client," Heywood said.

The rich content and loading element of the system enables airlines to market and retail their products more effectively, building on the existing cryptic GDS environment with a graphical display which centralises all product information.

Already 15 airlines have signed up for the system, with the rapid uptake indicating a strong market need.

When a fare is selected from the GDS screen, full details appear along with other fare options and available add-ons.

This enables travel consultants to provide full information to their clients as well as providing significant opportunities for companion sales or up-selling.

Heywood said that airlines are expected to dramatically increase the number of ancillary options they offer.

Ongoing development will see a fully dynamic approach to the system which could eventually see airlines able to "re-manage" seats down to individual seats on individual aircraft," he said.

## ON TRACK WITH LOCOMOTE

TRAVELPORT believes its 49% investment in Melbourne-based IT firm Locomote has "the potential to redefine the travel management landscape".

Locomote already had a close relationship with Travelport, having developed a mobile platform which grabs data from Travelport's Universal Profile and API to "empower corporations in the seamless management of their travel, authorisation and procurement processes".

The system offers real-time access to low-cost and network carriers as well as airline ancillaries, car rental and hotel content. Third party applications – such as corporate booking tools and expense management systems – can be easily integrated within the same platform to simplify the traveller and approval workflow.

Locomote's platform is already used by organisations such as World Vision, Medibank and the ANZ Bank.